

Letter to the editor
Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal
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To the editor:

It doesn't take much imagination to understand the perspective from which Bobby Harrison writes, but his column of June 27, 2006 ("Barbour changes his tune on black churches") is ridiculous on its face and erroneous in its content.

First, there is no question that money belonging to taxpayers has been illegally diverted to the Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi. Whether Bobby likes it or not, "reasonable" minds will find no disagreement on that fact.

Second, I have said many times the Partnership has done some good work in its very limited area of interest -- smoking cessation. Bobby's assertion that the Partnership "recently received an unlikely endorsement of its smoking prevention effort" from me is neither "new" nor "unlikely" nor an "endorsement."

Third is Bobby's tired attempt to taint the good intentions of African-American churches in this state that have decided to conduct comprehensive health programs that go way beyond anti-smoking. As I said when I unveiled my "Healthy Mississippi" initiative, too many Mississippians have chronic diseases, such as diabetes and hypertension, that are tied to lifestyle. Only by changing lifestyles can we hope to conquer overall health threats and that effort must involve issues much greater than smoking alone.

Fourth, injecting politics into the debate (insults the integrity of) does a disservice to the thousands of Mississippians who stand to be helped by our legitimate emphasis on things they can do to improve their health.

Fifth, Bobby deliberately failed to mention a huge difference in the approaches employed by the Partnership and my Health Mississippi initiative: The Partnership was giving black churches monetary grants and then fighting any independent audit of the funds to the extent that taxpayers have no idea how those funds were used; the resources we're giving the

churches are medical information, “Know Your Numbers” pamphlets, sample plans of how to address chronic diseases, and medical community partners to work with churches on agreed-in-advance goals and tools to measure results.

The difference is like night and day; it’s too bad Bobby Harrison won’t open his eyes.

Haley Barbour
Governor